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June 5, 1974

Professor Carlos Chagas
Centro Ciencias Medicas
Bloco K
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
Ilha do Fundao
Rio de Janeiro BRAZIL

Dear Professor Chagas,

I was honored to receive your letter of May 31st inviting me to attend a working party on Rome on "Oriented Mutations in Man". Although I believe this subject has perhaps been unduly inflated by comparison with many other pressing problems, it obviously does present eventual potential problems of a profound ethical and religious character and certainly deserves the most informed attention. I regret, however, that my schedule forbids me to accept your invitation for that particular period of time and I must offer my regrets. I take the liberty, however, of transmitting my most recent and most carefully considered writing on this general subject which may be a contribution of nearly equal value to my personal participation.

It is impossible not to comment that the official contemporary position of the highest ecclesiastical authorities with respect to the subject of contraception makes it difficult to see what will be the immediate useful outcome of discussions of this kind. However, I realize that the groundwork must be laid for a future reconsideration of these and many other issues on a more rational and humanitarian basis and that this may be the eventual utility of discussions of this sort. As I fully appreciate that this same subject remains highly controversial within the hierarchy, I can assure you that the realities of my schedule and not any unwillingness to enter into a dialogue are the reasons that I am not able to accept your invitation at this time.

I find it difficult to know whom to suggest as a possible alternative since I believe that many of my colleagues have faced these issues only very recently and are still suffering from some shock of adaptation in their attempt to understand their real meaning. Perhaps you might wish to consider Dr. Robert T. Francoeur who has written one or two books on this subject that may suffer from excessive popularization but are not wholly absurd.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Joshua Leder

over

P.S. Dr. Robert T. Fancoeur, Associate Professor of Experimental Embryology, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Florham-Madison Campus, 285 Madison Avenue, Madison, New Jersey 07940.

I should also have given you the name of Dr. R.G. Edwards, Physiological Laboratory, Cambridge CB2 3EG, England. You possibly know his name for his experimental work on egg transplantation which must be regarded as a somewhat distinct subject. However, I believe he has been more than unusually thoughtful in his concern about the ethical as well as scientific setting of this line of work, no matter whether one agrees with his eventual conclusions or not.